

TOWN/UNIVERSITY RELATIONS COMMITTEE
COMMITTEE MEETING
Tuesday, April 11, 2006
Audrey P. Beck Municipal Building
Council Chambers

Minutes

Present: J. Bell-Elkins, T. Callahan, R. Miller, E. Paterson, W. Simpson

Staff: M. Hart, M. Ninteau, C. van Zelm

Visitors: R. Adams, L. Sharpe

1. Opportunity for Public to Address the Committee

None.

2. March 14, 2006 Meeting Minutes

Mr. Simpson made a motion, seconded by Ms. Bell-Elkins, to approve the minutes of March 14, 2006. The motion passed unanimously.

3. Town of Mansfield Housing Code

Mr. Hart and Mr. Ninteau, Building Official, conducted a presentation concerning the proposed housing code for the Town of Mansfield.

As proposed, by ordinance the town would adopt the provisions of the International Property Maintenance Code, and amend, delete or add provisions to that code as necessary. The town has several residential rental properties in town that suffer from deteriorating conditions. To address this and related quality of life issues, town staff has prepared the housing code to regulate the conditions and maintenance of rental dwelling units within the Town of Mansfield, by providing standards for utilities, facilities and other items to ensure that the structures are safe, sanitary and fit for occupation and use. More specifically, the code would provide regulations concerning light, ventilation and occupancy; plumbing facilities and fixtures; mechanical and electrical systems; fire safety; exterior conditions, porches and decks; and other items.

With respect to complaints, the housing code would apply to all residential rental structures in town, with the exception of rental structures owned by the State of Connecticut. This means that a renter living anywhere in town could contact the housing office with a complaint, and the town would investigate the complaint and enforce any remedies, if required. The rental certification program, as outlined in more detail below, would be more limited in scope and would apply to all residential rental properties within the rental certification zone, with the exception of rental structures owned by the State of Connecticut, age-restricted housing (age 55 and older), properties owned by the Mansfield Housing Authority, new construction less than six years old, and owner-occupied rental housing consisting of no more than four units. At the request of the Town Council, the town would also exempt single-family dwelling units rented or leased for a period not to exceed one year when the original owner occupant will return to that unit as his or her primary residence at the end of the rental term or lease, as well as single-family dwelling units sold and rented or leased by the buyer to the seller as a condition of the sale to provide the seller with extended occupancy for a period not to exceed one year. (The town would exempt these various types of properties because they are generally better maintained.)

As referenced above, the code would establish a “rental certification zone” that is roughly equivalent to the greater Storrs area. This area has been defined to include the bulk of the rental units occupied by students, as that is where most of the problem issues can be found at this time. The certification zone would contain approximately 930 rental-housing units, including single and multi-family dwellings. The owners of rental properties within the zone could rent only with a certificate of compliance, or license to rent, issued by a Town of Mansfield housing code official. In order for the owner to obtain a certificate of compliance for any individual dwelling unit, the unit must satisfy the conditions of the code, which would be verified by a physical inspection of the premises by the code official. The certificate of compliance would be valid for a two-year period, and the proposed fee for the certificate is \$150 per unit.

The housing code would establish certain civil and criminal penalties for violations of the regulations. Such penalties would include a \$100

fine for each violation, and a separate fine for each day the violation persists, as well as prosecution in housing court if necessary. Prior to the issuance of a penalty, the code official would have the discretion in most instances to work with a property owner to bring a rental unit into compliance with the regulations. Landlords and property owners would have the right to appeal violations of the code to a housing code board of appeals, which members would be appointed by the Town Council.

The town would plan to hire one full-time and one part-time housing inspector to enforce the new housing code, as well as a full-time secretary to provide administrative support. The new staff would become part of the town's building department, and would report to the Building Official. The town's preliminary operating budget, which does not include one-time capital costs such as vehicles, office equipment, etc, is approximately \$150,000 per year. During the first year the town would anticipate generating approximately \$50,000-\$60,000 in revenues to offset the budget, and the revenue should increase in the following years.

Mayor Paterson, Mr. Callahan and other members of the committee complimented staff for its work on the proposed code, and commended the Town Council for its willingness to tackle such an important and challenging issue for the community.

4. Spring Weekend Preparation

Dr. Bell-Elkins reported that the university has consolidated its two new committees formed to address spring weekend into one entity. The committee will work to review policies, procedures and practices with respect to the event, and will also focus on offering more sanctioned activities, reducing the number of uninvited guests, and providing programs that enhance the reputation of the university.

Mr. Miller stated that his environmental student group is also sponsoring a number of activities for spring weekend, and he will provide Dr. Bell-Elkins with this information.

Mayor Paterson stated that the university has decided upon a policy to deny admission to an incoming student who commits a violation during spring weekend.

Dr. Bell-Elkins added that the Undergraduate Student Government (USG) would be hosting a pep rally to encourage responsible and safe behavior over spring weekend.

5. Update re: Mansfield Downtown Partnership

Ms. Van Zelm reported that staff and the development team continue to make progress with the special design district for Storrs Center. In addition, staff and the development team members are working to obtain public financing from the state and federal governments, and are preparing the application to the planning and zoning commission to rezone the parcel for the new building 1A. The team also plans to meet with the neighbors and adjoining property owners to review the plans for the new building 1A.

In other news, in collaboration with the town, the Downtown Partnership is working on the June 24, 2006 "Tour de Mansfield; Village to Village" bike tour event as well as the September "Festival on the Green" celebration. Ms. Van Zelm is also pleased to welcome Ms. Tricia Rogalski as the partnership's new administrative assistant.

6. Community-Campus Partnership

Ms. Bell-Elkins reported that later this month the Mansfield Community-Campus Partnership would hold its last meeting of the academic year. The group will also try to meet at least once during the summer.

7. Other Business

The committee expressed its condolences to Dr. Pappanikou regarding the passing of his wife, Lucette.

The committee adjourned its meeting at 5:06 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Matthew W. Hart
Assistant Town Manager